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AUTHOR Braswell, Ray
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ABSTRACT

This study reports on an examination of the experiences and expectations of the older university student who is returning to school to either complete a degree or begin a new career--one who in all likelihood did not have any computer experience before attending university classes. Specifically, the study was designed to: (1) compare attitudes towards computer use between returning and new students; (2) determine potential computer use by returning students; and (3) determine perceived present and potential use of computers in schools by those who plan to teach in the future. Participants were 28 graduate and undergraduate students ranging in age from 19 to 47 (with an average age of 33) from two university computer literacy classes. Students were surveyed at the beginning and at the end of the class to determine their attitudes towards the utilization of computers. Data were analyzed using a Pearson correlation based upon the survey responses, student status (returning or new), and age of the respondent. Preliminary results indicate that the returning student demonstrates a more positive attitude towards the use of computers. While results of the pre-class survey indicated a larger potential for use of computers among returning students than among new students, the survey at the end of the class showed a similarity between the two groups, with the attitudes of the new students more in line with those of the returning students, whose positive attitudes towards the use of computers had increased slightly. These results indicate a greater need for more inservice education opportunities for teachers. (GL)

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Attitudes of the Returning University Student Towards the Use of Computers

Ray Braswell
206 Education
Auburn University at Montgomery
Montgomery, AL 36117

The expanding role of computers in today's educational settings can not be ignored. The ability to adapt instruction in order to best make use of new technologies is fast becoming a necessity for educators. Many existing teacher education programs have already included in their programs a component which allows the student to become familiar with computers, software, and other technologies. These computer literacy classes, however, are being seen more and more as extensions of experiences which the students have had while attending high school. *The First National Assessment for Computer Competence*, for example, reports that an average of 52% of all eleventh grade students are studying computers.

This study reports on an examination of the experiences and expectations of the older university student who is returning to school to either complete a degree or begin a new career - one who in all likelihood did not have any computer experience before attending university classes. Specifically, the study reported here was designed to:

- Compare attitudes toward computer use between returning and new students.
- Determine potential computer use by returning students.
- Determine perceived present and potential use of computers in schools by those who plan to teach in the future.

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Methodology

Participants. Participants in this study were twenty-eight graduate and undergraduate students from two university computer literacy classes. Student ages ranged from 19 to 47. The average age of the returning student was approximately 33 years old. Students were surveyed at the beginning and at the end of the computer literacy class to determine attitudes towards the utilization of computers. Previous use of computers varied from none to those students who were using computers several times weekly.

Data Sources and Analysis. This study began with the problem of evaluating the potential use of computers among both pre-service and experienced teachers presently attending education classes. The university population consists of approximately 38% returning students. In order to determine the attitudes of these students towards the use of computers in their chosen fields, surveys were conducted which addressed attitudes toward age and computer use, desire to learn how to use computers, utilizing computers when teaching, and student use of computers. The resulting data was then analyzed utilizing a Pearson correlation based upon the responses given in the survey and the student status (returning/new) and age of the respondent.

Results/Conclusions

The preliminary results of the survey indicate that the returning student demonstrates a more positive attitude towards the use of computers. In several of the issues addressed in the survey, the returning student, in the survey at the beginning of

the computer literacy class, indicated a larger potential for use of computers than did the new students ($p < .05$):

- Returning students think they will use computers more when they teach. $r(28) = .499$
- Returning students think that computers will be used more in the schools. $r(28) = .334$
- Returning students tend to think that everyone should learn how to use computers. $r(28) = .308$
- Returning students think that computers will make teaching easier. $r(28) = .442$
- Returning students will probably use computers after the class more than will new students. $r(28) = .392$

Survey results at the end of the computer literacy class showed a similarity between both groups, with the attitudes of the new students more in-line with those of the returning students (whose attitudes towards the use of computers increased slightly).

Educational Significance

This study offers several potential benefits to educators who are both presently teaching and are planning to teach. The potential for computer use by educators is reflected in the positive attitudes shown by both new and returning students. The information presented in this study leads to the following proposals:

• There should be more in-service available to those presently teaching. Once students have been exposed to the use of computers, the students feel that they will use computers. This same attitude often appears in in-service workshops in which teachers are exposed to various types of computer use and software. Rathje (1988), states that "as teachers become comfortable with using computer applications, they will expand their use of these tools in their instruction" (foreword). The potential for use of new technology exists and should be developed to its fullest.

• Teachers should have more access to computers, both for themselves and for their students. Students with teaching experience feel that access to a computer will make teaching easier. The teachers who have access to a computer will probably make use of them. Unfortunately, access to a computer is directly related to the area of the country and socio-economic status. As Martinez and Mead (1988) note, students in high metropolitan and medium-sized cities have a higher computer use rate than those students in big city or low metropolitan areas. In addition, northeastern areas reported higher computer usage than did southwestern areas.

• Those who have experienced the use of computers feel that computers will provide new methods of teaching. Students who have used computers feel that they will use the computers in their classrooms and that the use of computers will enhance their teaching situation. Martinez and Mead (1988), however, report that "computers are seldom used in subject areas such as reading, math, or science" (p. 6). This trend may be reversed as more computer literate educators emerge from our computer literacy classes.

As a footnote, further review of the information provided by this study could lead to the conclusion that computer education classes presently being offered in our public

schools may not be addressing the actual needs of the students. The emphasis, in Alabama schools, on programming as a major component of computer classes in the secondary schools, may offer some indication for the responses given by the new students. This question needs further investigation.

References

Martinez, M. E., & Mead, N. A. (1988). Computer competence: The first national assessment (Report No. 17-CC-01). Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Services.

Rathje, L. (1988). AppleWorks for Educators: A beginning and intermediate workbook. Eugene, OR: International Society for Technology in Education Publications.